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### Gendering Women's Homelessness

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## Gendering Women's Homelessness

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### Abstract

The importance of developing gender-sensitive policy responses to women's homelessness has emerged in recent literature on homelessness. To achieve this, policy responses must recognise the diverse and complex needs of all homeless women, including those accompanied or unaccompanied by their children. This paper reviews some of the key literature on homelessness to ascertain the extent to which gender is recognised in explanations of homelessness. What emerges is that current frameworks fail to recognise the depth of inequalities experienced by homeless mothers who are unaccompanied by their children. This leads to the stigmatising of this group as 'bad' mothers. This paper recognises the importance of the affective domain as a key site for understanding and analysing the multiple inequalities that shape women's experiences of homelessness. It suggests that inserting the affective domain into approaches for understanding home and homelessness will go some way to ensuring that definitions of homelessness 'avoid the stigmatisation of homeless people' (Edgar 2009, p.13) and towards enabling the conditions for equality-based outcomes for all women.

### Keywords

Gender; homelessness; deserving and undeserving mothers; affective (in)equality; nurturing capital.

### Introduction

This article seeks to identify the extent to which gender is recognised in definitions, explanations and research on homelessness. It does this by offering a gendered analysis of women's homelessness, and by looking specifically at homeless mothers who are unaccompanied by their children.<sup>i</sup> In doing so, it becomes evident that a gender-blind approach to explaining housing need and homelessness amongst homeless mothers who are unaccompanied by their children masks the depth of inequalities that they experience. In particular, this article shows how a lack of recognition of the affective system<sup>ii</sup> as a key site for the (re)production of inequalities intersecting with the economic, political and cultural systems (O'Brien 2007, 2009; Lynch 2007; Lynch and Lyons 2009a; Lynch and Lyons 2009b), masks the extent to which the conditions of homelessness for unaccompanied mothers exacerbate affective injustices.

The political, economic and cultural systems influence the affective system because they enable people to do care and love work, by providing access to adequate resources to support this work. Alternatively they can 'disable' people from being able to provide love and care, because those providing love and care are prevented from accessing adequate resources, or power needed to support this work, or because the contributions they make are not recognised or respected (Lynch and Baker 2009, p. 219).

This article identifies how excluding the affective sphere from explanations of homelessness, leads to the stigmatising of mothers unaccompanied by their children, as 'bad' mothers. It highlights how a lack of recognition of the depth of gender inequalities experienced by some homeless women results in a failure to recognise and provide access to resources, such as nurturing capital, which promotes and supports the capacity to nurture others. This means that homeless unaccompanied mothers experience deep affective injustices. These affective inequalities not only prolong women's experiences of homelessness, but also compound their exclusion as relational and affective beings (Lynch 2010).

Although it is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the affective system in detail, the need to incorporate the affective domain into definitions of home and homelessness is identified as essential. This is because it allows for a deeper understanding of how homeless policies might re-orientate towards more equality-based outcomes, which recognise that all 'people should be roughly equally enabled and empowered to live their lives' (Lynch and Baker 2009, p.230).

### **The gender dimension to women's homelessness**

Increasing recognition of the growing trends of homeless women has emerged in research on homelessness over the past fifteen years. Studies from Europe identify the significantly gendered nature of women's homeless pathways and their disadvantaged and subordinate position within society (Aldridge 2001; Baptista 2010; Batty et al. 2010; Doherty 2001; Edgar and Doherty 2001; Quilgar and Pleace 2010; Reeve, Casey and Goudie 2006; Young 2010). Furthermore, empirical studies from Europe, (Bilton 2008; Dwyer et al. 2011; Radford et al. 2011) and the USA (Roos et al. 2013; Christensen et al. 2005) demonstrate that homeless women had experienced greater levels of sexual abuse and emotional abuse than men in childhood, and into adulthood. Moreover, a significant number of studies, in addition to those already mentioned, also demonstrate a relationship between motherhood, family status and homelessness: in particular the reality of mother-child separations amongst women who are homeless (Cowall et al. 2002; Culhane et al. 2003; Hoffman and Rosenheck 2001; Park et al. 2004; Revolving door-St. Mungos 2010; Welch-lazoritz et al. 2014). In Ireland, the

most recent and comprehensive studies available on women and homelessness includes those by Mayock and Sheridan (2012a; 2012b), Mayock et al. (2015b) and subsequent articles.<sup>iii</sup> We know from this research that poverty, violence/abuse in childhood, intimate partner violence, imprisonment and motherhood all influence women's journeys into, through and out of homelessness.<sup>iv</sup>

Homeless women are often stigmatised, marginalised and alienated by society (Barrow and Laborde 2008; Connolly, 2000; Gustafson 2011). They also experience multiple forms of vulnerability that place them at risk of exploitation and abuse (Batty et al. 2010; Bowpitt et al. 2011b). In light of the emerging recognition in research of the gender-specific basis to women's homelessness, a salient finding from Mayock et al. points to:

The need to re-orientate policy towards gender sensitive approaches that take account of the diverse and complex situations of women, including those who are living with or apart from their children. (Mayock et al. 2015a, p.20)

In Ireland, over the past ten years a series of policies to prevent and/or end homelessness, have been adopted (see O'Sullivan 2008; 2012 for discussion on this). Policy developments have positioned housing and the housing-related needs of homeless groups as central to ending and preventing homelessness. In addition to this, the delivery of wide-ranging social, health and other welfare services have also been identified as playing a key role at preventing homelessness at a structural level (cited in O'Sullivan 2012, p.26). However, within the policy domain, homelessness continues to be defined primarily as a housing issue meaning that all other matters relating to homelessness, such as gender and care, are seen as secondary to this.

Research carried out by Mayock et al., examining narratives of homeless women, reveal a lack of 'financial and emotional support in relation to mothering' (Mayock et al. 2015b, p.35). The consequences of this lack of support led some homeless women to return to abusive relationships from where they subsequently re-emerged into homelessness again, and were separated from their children, who were placed in the care of the state (Mayock et al. 2015b). Recognition of the complex, gender-specific dimensions to homelessness, such as women's relationship to mothering, domestic abuse and homelessness, are virtually absent in homeless policy documents (O'Connor 2006; Mayock et al. 2015b; Sonas Housing 2013; Women's Aid 2016), as there is no express recognition of domestic abuse within the statutory definition of homelessness, outlined in Section 2 of the Housing 1988 (Sonas Housing 2013; Women's Aid 2016). Mayock et al. (2015a) emphasise that it is imperative that homeless policies reflect the complex conditions of homeless women's lives, and do not reinforce an

'ideology of gender neutrality', which hides the multitude of ways that women hold significantly less power than men in society (Kittay 1999, p.11).

### **Gendering definitions and explanations for homelessness**

Explanations and definitions of homelessness have traditionally been contested and there has been little agreement as to the specific causes of homelessness (Busch-Geertsema et al. 2010). The dominant theme featured in homelessness research has related to housing matters: for example, whether or not someone had accommodation available to them. The emphasis on homelessness, as a specific housing matter, meant that for a long time a broader definition relating to the production of poverty was ruled out (Tosi 2010). In recent years, efforts have been made to broaden understandings and definitions of homelessness by combining housing and poverty approaches (Edgar 2009; FEANSTA 2005). Those researching and working with homeless people have begun to conceptualise homelessness as being along a continuum, with people who are sleeping rough at one end, to those stably housed at the other. This broader definition of homelessness has allowed room to consider who might fall in between either extreme<sup>v</sup> along the continuum: for example women, who often form part of the 'hidden' homeless population (Baptista 2010; Mayock et al. 2012a; Watson and Austerberry 1986).

Evidence of the broadening of categories of homelessness has begun to feature more in the recent literature on women's homelessness. Here women, as part of the 'hidden homeless' population, are frequently found to be: staying with friends or relatives, fleeing domestically abusive relationships, or (re)entering into relationships with men, as opposed to staying in emergency hostel accommodation (Baptista 2010; Batty et al. 2010; Mayock and Sheridan 2012; Quilgar and Pleace 2010; Thorn 2001). The characterisation of women's homelessness as often invisible is of particular salience because official definitions of homelessness are often based solely on a housing framework (such as in the case of statutory definitions of homelessness). Static definitions of homelessness can therefore exclude those who form part of the hidden homeless population, leaving some women outside the categories for research on homelessness (Watson 1999). Consequently, when considering the value of a broader understanding of homelessness, it is also important to recognise that it only exists to the extent that all categories of homelessness, in particular the more hidden forms, are incorporated into research designs and definitions of homelessness (Baptista 2010; Watson 1999).

For instance, Watson (1999, p.87) suggests that:

...it is those statistics which register homelessness before it is institutionalised in hostels, on waiting lists or other forms of provision which are likely to give us the most accurate picture of homelessness.

The more recent definition of homelessness offered by FEANTSA<sup>vi</sup> seeks to remedy the traditional exclusion of certain categories of homelessness. The conceptual approach used defines a home as:

... having a decent dwelling (or space) adequate to meet the needs of the person and his/her family (physical domain); being able to maintain privacy and enjoy social relations (social domain) and having exclusive possession, security of occupation and legal title (legal domain). (FEANTSA 2005 n.p)

Homelessness is defined where people are excluded from one or all of the three spheres that are considered to represent a home (FEANTSA 2005). This definition of homelessness and housing exclusion considers four theoretical dimensions within which homelessness or housing exclusion can occur (FEANTSA 2005).<sup>vii</sup> These dimensions of homelessness and housing exclusion then form what is known as the “ETHOS typology of homelessness” (Edgar 2009, p.15) and act as a working definition of homelessness and housing exclusion (Edgar 2009).

Edgar suggests that definitions of homelessness and housing exclusion should ‘avoid the stigmatisation of the homeless’ (Edgar 2009, p.13). This is achieved, it can be assumed, by highlighting the various forms of housing exclusion that people face, which might place them at risk of homelessness. For example, the category of houselessness covers five living situations that are defined as homelessness. The category of houselessness includes, among others; people who are living in homeless accommodation or domestic violence refuges, or those leaving institutions such as psychiatric hospitals; while insecure accommodation includes those at risk of eviction or those living in domestically abusive situations. This way, a broader understanding of the range of needs that people experiencing housing exclusion or homelessness have, can be identified and reflected within policy, service design and delivery (FEANTSA 2005). Because this definition considers those found in more hidden homeless situations, it would appear to go some way to offering a broader understanding of the various housing and other-related needs that homeless women might have.

However, the assumption that women feature more prominently amongst the hidden homeless population has been challenged somewhat by Fitzpatrick (2005). She suggests that there is evidence from UK studies which identifies that women tend to approach housing bodies more often on becoming homeless, and so, are likely to feature more prominently within official

homeless statistics. Furthermore, Fitzpatrick (2005) asserts that women with children are often responded to in a more caring way than single men are. In fact, Fitzpatrick et al. (2012) suggest that, single men in particular can have more complex needs that go unmet, resulting in many remaining 'hidden' from official counts (Fitzpatrick 2005). Passaro (1996, p.2) suggests a reason for these differences is because 'homeless men are failed men, in traditional gender terms because they are needy and unable to support themselves'. In contrast to this, homeless women 'benefit from traditional gender ideologies because their individual failures are not compounded by gender failure...Many...act meek, don't cause trouble, and are grateful for help...' (Passaro 1996, p.2). However recent research from Ireland by Mayock and Sheridan (2012a, p.5) provides evidence that significant numbers of women lived for lengthy periods in 'hidden' homeless situations, as opposed to using more formal homeless services. Mayock and Sheridan (2012) discuss how:

Women's movements were patterned in complex ways and the spaces they occupied were often ambiguous and precarious. Stable independent housing had never become a reality for these women, and, instead they temporarily disappeared from sites of official homelessness only to resurface sometime later in the system...The places where they resided in the intervening periods-whether in hospitals, prisons, the homes of family members, friends or partners...were sites of hidden...homelessness...where they frequently experienced further isolation and loneliness. (Mayock et al. 2015a, p.18)

### **Causes of homelessness- individual or structural factors**

There has been considerable debate internationally about the causes of homelessness, due to its socially constructed character (Neale 1997; Busch-Geertsema et al. 2010; O'Sullivan 2008; Tosi 2010). Initial explanations focused on individual characteristics associated with the person experiencing homelessness (Busch-Geertsema et al. 2010; O'Sullivan 2008). These accounts often emerged within social work responses which sought to 'blame' or label the individual as either deviant or immoral. The characteristics and needs of the person who is homeless were seen as the cause of a person's homelessness. Consequently, responses to homelessness sought ways to 'fix' the person so they could function effectively within society (Busch-Geertsema et al. 2010; Neale 1997). Among the various criticisms of individualistic explanations is the lack of emphasis placed on the structural conditions that shape the lives of homeless people, and how a "language of disability", attributed to the person, has framed research and policy on homelessness (Snow et al. 1994; see also Zufferey 2009).

The relevance of structural explanations subsequently emerged within the literature on homelessness. Structural explanations have focused on the influence of broader socio-economic factors and how they impact on people's relationship to housing (Busch-Geertsema et al. 2010). For example: research has demonstrated a relationship between poor welfare policies; a shortage of suitable and affordable housing options, and/or poor access to labour market/labour market inflexibility, and poverty (Benjaminsen & Andrade 2015; Edgar and Doherty 2001; Shinn 2010; Stephens and Fitzpatrick 2007; Stephens et al. 2010). Although the structural explanations offered an alternative to the pathologising accounts found within individual explanations, recognition that neither explanation adequately explained the complex dynamics at play for different groups experiencing homelessness was developing (Busch-Geertsema et.al 2010).

Evidence of more diverse categories of homeless people was also emerging within research, particularly amongst female-headed lone parent families living in poverty (Kuhn and Culhane 1998; Culhane et al. 2007; Metraux and Culhane 1999; Shinn et al. 2005). Studies in the USA (and within Europe, to a lesser degree), subsequently identified three main sub-groups<sup>viii</sup> of homeless people: transitional; episodic and chronic (see Kuhn and Culhane 1998;<sup>ix</sup> Benjaminsen and Andrade 2015). According to O'Sullivan (2012, p. 12-13) these sub-groups of homeless people 'have broadly similar characteristics and needs'. Female-headed lone-parent families living in poverty are reported to feature predominantly amongst the transitional population of homeless people, while men are reported mainly amongst the episodic and chronic categories, who frequently present with additional complex needs, such as mental health difficulties or substance misuse issues (Kuhn and Culhane 1998). It is worth noting, however, that Kuhn and Culhane's (1998) study did reveal the prevalence of women within the chronic and episodic sub-groups, albeit in smaller numbers to men. The fact that the data for Kuhn and Culhane's study is derived from analyses of shelter usage might have prohibited an accurate insight into the real numbers of women experiencing homelessness, particularly those who form part of the hidden homeless population, as evidenced in Mayock et al. (2015a, p.18) research noted earlier.

#### **A more comprehensive understanding- 'new orthodoxy'**

In recognition of the complex interplay between individual and structural factors in the lives of sub-groups of homeless people, a new 'orthodoxy' to understanding homelessness emerged over the past ten years (Dwyer et al. 2011). This orthodoxy sees that 'homelessness is caused by a complex interrelation of societal and individual factors, occurring in certain circumstances, to certain people' (Mc Naughton 2008, p.9). Although regarded as useful at providing insight into the structural forces at work in homelessness, this 'new orthodoxy' has been criticised for not providing an



understanding of relationships within and between complex systems (Sommerville 2013; Fitzpatrick 2005). Specifically, the interrelationship between, and the processes underpinning, the interaction between structural forces and individual actions is merely described and not adequately explained (Fitzpatrick 2005; Sommerville 2013). Mc Naughton (2008), in her biographical research, is regarded as providing a more comprehensive insight into this interrelationship (Sommerville 2013).

The narratives from Mc Naughton's (2008, p.168-169) study reveal how participants: 'all described the causes of their homelessness as individual events, such as drug and alcohol use, relationship breakdown, and mental illness'. Mc Naughton (2008, p.79) further explains however that:

Individual factors that cause homelessness (addiction or bereavement for example) could occur in anyone's life. It is asserted here that the key difference in circumstance that means these events lead to homelessness, is when people lack resources of human, social, material, or financial capital to negate the effects of these individually experienced negative events. (McNaughton 2008, p.79)... That they led to homelessness...related to broader structural contexts whereby the people studied had relatively low levels of resources. Resources of human, social, material, and financial capital provide a buffer to the negative effects of such events, and are accessible (or not) due to structural mechanisms. (McNaughton 2008, p.169)

Mc Naughton's research therefore suggests that homelessness occurs in a context where individuals are excluded from accessing the necessary resources required to manage challenging events that happen in their lives. Since the complexity of factors at play in the lives of homeless people therefore cannot be explained simply by reference to economic or housing structures, Mc Naughton (2008) argues that a more complex framework is required.

Recently, the concept of multiple exclusion homelessness (MEH) has been developed as a way to think about homeless people's experiences of 'deep social exclusion' (Bowpitt et al. 2011a, p.3.). The Multiple Exclusion Homelessness framework seeks to explain the way that many factors intersect in the lives of people who are homeless, other than solely housing, including their 'non-engagement with, or exclusion from, effective contact with support services' (Bowpitt et al. 2011a, p.3; see also Brown et al. 2011; Cornes et al. 2011; Dwyer et al. 2011; Fitzpatrick et al. 2012).

**Barriers to exiting homelessness: the cultural and moral conditions of homelessness**

Mc Naughton's thesis goes some way to explaining why it is that only certain people, who experience poverty or unemployment, or mental illness or abuse, become homeless. However, it does not explain how individuals exit homelessness (Sommerville 2013). This, Sommerville suggests, is best achieved by examining the social and cultural contexts of people's homelessness (see Brown et al. 2011). For example, in the context of multiple exclusion homelessness, Bowpitt et al. (2011b, p. 544) suggest that, while there are many similarities in the way that men and women experience or address homelessness, they do so in the context of a society in which men and women's opportunities and vulnerabilities are governed by gender relations and associated expectations. These gender relations then influence the various 'pathways' women take into, through and out of homelessness, including their 'susceptibility to homelessness, in their experiences of homelessness and in their encounters with accommodation services' (Bowpitt 2011b, p.537).

Recognition of the capricious relationship that homeless people have with agencies of the state, including homeless service providers, welfare agencies or within the 'homeless industry' itself, including barriers to accessing services/exiting homelessness, has emerged within the literature (Biederman et al. 2013; Biederman and Nicholis 2014; Hoffman and Coffey 2008; Hutchinson et al. 2014; Mayock et al. 2015b; Sznajder-Murray and Slesnick 2011). Contrary to traditional gender representations of women's homelessness discussed by Fitzpatrick (2005), some women experience similar difficulties to men when trying to secure services (Dwyer et al. 2011). That is, the complexities of their needs are not recognised in policy or practice responses. Women who fail to adhere to prescribed gender roles can experience similarly limited options to single men (Passaro 1996). What this suggests then is that cultural stereotypes of gender affect the way that society views homelessness (Borchard 2005), where being "homeless" means much more than simply "houseless", it is also a cultural and moral location as well' (Passaro 1996, p.4).

**What gendering women's homelessness reveals**

There is an ambiguity surrounding the gendering of women's homelessness. This is evident from the way that traditional explanations of homelessness have assumed that homeless (individuals) are men, and as such, policy provision and responses to homeless men have been the primary concern when responding to homelessness (O'Sullivan 2008). A reason for the invisibility of women in research on homelessness, O'Sullivan (2008) suggests, is that other explanations were provided to explain women's relationship to homelessness. In Ireland, for example, constructions were influenced by a gendered ideology that placed women within the home, or

viewed women who transgressed society's norms as deviant (O'Sullivan 2008). This view was reflected in the political belief in Ireland during the twentieth century 'that the proper function of women was motherhood, that their place was in the home, tending to the needs of their husband and children' and that '...only abnormal women thought otherwise' (Valiulis 1995, p.153). As a result of this gendered ideology, women who were 'out of home', were often incarcerated, stigmatised, labelled as eccentric, or seen as 'fallen women' in need of saving (Luddy 1997; 2007; Smith 2007; Mc Carthy 2000; Mc Carthy 2010; O'Sullivan and O'Donnell 2007). Until the 1980's the pervasive view of women 'out of home' was that they were 'derelict eccentrics who chose their lifestyles...' (Stoner 1983, p.570 cited in O'Sullivan 2008). This gendered ideology forged a direct association between women's socially constructed 'natural role', motherhood, and their place within the home. It stigmatised and marginalised those who did not conform to this dominant view. It also neglected to consider the notion that the home was often a site of oppression for many women.

Feminist writers such as, Watson (1984) and Watson and Austerberry (1986) among others, countered this neglect by examining:

how patriarchal social relations, the sexual division of labour and the dominant family model in a capitalist society all serve to marginalise women in the housing sphere. (Watson and Austerberry 1986, p.7)

Whilst the analysis provided by some feminists to homelessness brought private issues into the public domain, their critiques of housing were also at risk of dominating tendencies (Neale 1997). A key assumption underpinning early feminist arguments was that women belong to a homogeneous static category with essential characteristics that separate them from men. Radley et al. (2006) assert that:

Researchers often make the assumption that women are alike or are subject to the same social pressures. While it is almost certain that homeless women will have some things in common it cannot be assumed that this is the case in all respects. (Radley et al. 2006, p.439)

Consequently the concern with using static or essentialist gender categories<sup>x</sup> in research on homelessness is that one explanation is then said to fit all members of a group uniformly (Hancock 2007, p.68). In reality, although a woman's access to housing is gendered, it also differs depending on other structural divisions in society. For example: her marital status, age, sexual orientation, social class, history of paid employment and whether she is categorised as either single or as the head of a family (Wasoff 1998, p.127). Therefore, as will become evident, a danger with using essentialist gender categories which are based on hegemonic representations of gender to

conceptualise women's homelessness is that it will result in the bifurcation of homeless mothers into categories such as 'deserving' and 'undeserving'. These divisions then exacerbate the depth of injustices that some homeless mothers experience.

### **The effects of hegemonic gender categories: deserving and undeserving mothers**

Fitzpatrick (2005) suggests that homeless women are often treated more favourably than homeless men. There is a tendency for local authorities to prioritise the housing needs of women accompanied by dependent children (Edgar 2001; Fitzpatrick 2005; Reeve et al. 2006). However, research from England has demonstrated that, where homeless mothers are unaccompanied by their children, they have been classified and responded to in a similar way to single homeless men by housing authorities (Dwyer et al., 2011; Reeve et al. 2006; 2007; Revolving Door-St Mungos 2010). A study by Reeve et al. (2006), which looked specifically at single homeless women, found that one-third of the cohort of 'single' women they interviewed were mothers whose children were not living with them at the time of the research.<sup>xi</sup> The majority of mothers in the study however were treated as single women by housing authorities, despite the fact that most hoped to be reunited with their children once they had secured suitable accommodation (Reeve et al. 2006).

The 'one size fits all' approach to service provision for 'single' homeless women appears to impact on the nature of responses offered to this particular group of homeless women (Barrow and Laborde 2008). For example, engagement with housing officers has had a direct influence on the 'choices' made available to women. One of the case studies included in the report by Reeve et al. (2007), about a young homeless single mother with a drug addiction called 'Anna', illustrates this case in point. Anna had been evicted from a Local Authority housing tenure due to rent arrears. She was refused accommodation on becoming homeless for the second time. Anna was advised that they would not accommodate her at that time; however they did offer to accommodate her son, placing him into care. Anna's son, who had been staying with his father while Anna was homeless, remained there. Anna subsequently remained separated from him and homeless for over two years following this engagement with the housing officer (Reeve et al. 2007). The reasons for not offering accommodation to young homeless mothers with complex needs such as Anna were attributed to static policies within local authorities, which did not recognise the complexity of the conditions in Anna's life (Reeve et al. 2007).

Research also suggests that service providers and personnel play a critical role in exacerbating separated mother's experiences of homelessness, prolonging separation of mother and child (Barrow and Lawinski 2009; Hutchinson et al. 2014). Family reunification is not always encouraged

where mother-child separations have occurred in the context of homelessness (Barrow and Laborde 2008; Culhane et al. 2003; Hoffman and Rosencheck 2001; Zlotnick et al. 1998; Zlotnick et al. 1999). For example, research by Hoffman and Rosencheck (2001), revealed how assessments of 'single women' (unaccompanied by their children) fail to consider the resources that unaccompanied mothers have, that could assist with the reunification of their children (see also Barrow and Laborde 2008). This failure to recognise the resources of unaccompanied mothers is often internalised as a source of stigma and shame by mothers. Homeless women separated from their children have described how they "feel judged as women" because they do not live up to the expectations of "good mothers" (Hutchinson et al. 2014, p.13), who can maintain a home. Consequently a homeless mother may feel "powerlessness as a parent" (Mayock et al., 2015a, p.14). These negative self-identities often impede mothers from successfully exiting homelessness, thereby prolonging their experiences of hidden homelessness (Hutchinson et al. 2014, p.13; Snow et al. 1994). According to Canton et al. (2007):

Women's 'single' status may also produce a trajectory of particular invisibility through homelessness because... Mothers who are homeless for more than one year are more likely to lose custody of their children, and therefore less likely to qualify for welfare entitlements and others forms of support available to children. (cited in Mayock et al. 2014, p.4)

Consequently, the nature of responses provided to homeless women, it could be argued, reinforce the historical association of motherhood with housing and definitions of the home (Wardaugh 1999). Where women fail to live up to the expectation of 'good mother: they become the antithesis of good mothers- 'bad' mothers (Gustafson, 2011, p.28):

The stereotypical image of the bad mother...is the women who neglects, abuses or fails to protect her child. A woman who is thought to be motivated by selfishness, self-absorption and self-indulgence- all individual deficits. (Gustafson 2011, p.28)

Connolly (2000 cited in Cosgrove and Flynn, 2005 p. 133) describes this process of stereotyping of homeless mothers, as the 'the stigma of the anti-citizen as well as the anti-mother'. The emerging themes which stigmatise homeless mothers as 'poor' and 'other mothers', Connolly cautions, reveal significant insights into cultural norms which seek to regulate mothers who deviate from the norm. Connolly (2000, xvii) thus argues that:

In effect, dominant standards of good mother readily become another source of injury for mothers whose finances, education, age, living conditions, marital status, and available strategies of solace and escape

render such standards out of reach or counterproductive....[and] their immersion in pain render them unable to act out the middle-class idea. (Connolly 2000, p.49)

Unlike Sommerville (2013), Fitzpatrick (2005, p.12) argues that homelessness 'is not a cultural phenomenon but rather a signifier of objective material and social conditions'. However, what is evident from the discussion so far, as Passaro (1996, p.3) suggests, is that homelessness is also 'a problem about "home", about the cultural imperatives that are created and reinforced through the ideology of' normative motherhood, whereby: 'the only homeless adults who will be housed are those who return to or recreate normative "homes"-and the gender roles they imply...' (Passaro, 1996, p.3).

### **The relationship between affective inequalities and understanding women's homelessness**

Current explanations of homelessness do not adequately capture the complexity of homeless women's lives. Without adequate accounts of the processes underpinning mother-child separations in the context of homelessness, such events are understood and experienced as individual deficits, and not the result of a lack of appropriate resources available to mothers to provide love and care for their children. As has been discussed, Mc Naughton (2008) recognises the inter-relationship of various capitals-economic, cultural, social and human capital that buffer individual/group experiences of homelessness. However, there is no consideration given to the importance (absence) of more acutely gendered capitals, such as nurturing and emotional capital,<sup>xii</sup> and how inequalities in access to these capitals might exacerbate women's experiences of homelessness. Nurturing capital is the outcome of:

the amount of personal love and care people have received in the intimate sphere of life and in the degrees of solidarity that exist in public spheres...public services and the physical, social and cultural environment. (Lynch and Walsh, 2009, p.39)

Where people are deprived of access to nurturing capital, or intimate loving relations and bonds of care, and instead experience abuse, violence or inequality, at any stage across the life course, they experience affective injustices (Lynch et al. 2009; Feeley 2009). Affective inequalities also occur when love and care work, carried out by people, is not acknowledged politically, socially or economically (Lynch 2010, p.2). This is because:

The world of care is not an isolated and autonomous sphere. It is deeply interwoven with economic, political and cultural relations, and inequalities in the latter can undermine the capacities and resources

to do love, care and solidarity work. (Baker et al. as cited in Lynch and Walsh 2009, p.41)

Because of the ongoing moral duty placed on women to provide love and care as part of their 'natural role', affective inequality is a gendered issue (Lynch and Lyons 2008; Lynch 2007; Lynch and Lyons 2009a; 2009b; O'Brien 2007; 2009). Where homeless unaccompanied mothers 'fail' in this 'duty' towards their children, they are stigmatised as 'bad mothers', without regard to how the conditions of homelessness can diminish the resources available to provide love and care for their children. A key contention of this paper is that in order for the development of gender-sensitive approaches to homelessness policy, recognition of how the affective sphere (intersecting with the economic, political and cultural systems) (re)produce inequalities in the lives of homeless women, is essential. If gender was theorised more explicitly, as a more fully intersectional process in the exercise of power, it would elucidate the way in which gender relations are reproduced through cultural stereotypes (hegemonies), associated with, for example, discourses of motherhood, care and home/homelessness (Choo and Feree 2010, p.141; Budgeon 2013; Zufferey 2009; 2010).

Furthermore, to ensure the re-orientation of policy towards gender-sensitive approaches that recognise the depth of inequalities that homeless women experience, including mothers accompanied or unaccompanied by their children (Mayock et al. 2015a), there is a need to incorporate the affective sphere into definitions and research on homelessness. Doing this would allow for a more in-depth recognition of how structural injustices, such as gender-based violence, poverty and homelessness, intersect with and exacerbate affective injustices, to influence women's experiences of homelessness across the life course.

The current definition of home and homelessness, discussed by Edgar (2009), recognises the importance of the intersection of the physical, social and legal domains. However, this definition does not adequately capture the depth of domains that constitute home and homelessness for women, particularly where they are separated from their children. The consequences of which results in the stigmatisation of this group of mothers.

Without an adequate home, people not only lack a safe physical place to live, to maintain privacy and security, they also lack a safe space for providing and expressing love and care. In a society where the primary moral responsibility for providing love and care continues to rest with women, the salience of the affective domain for developing gender-sensitive approaches in homeless policy cannot be overstated. This is because the affective sphere is the most relevant site for understanding the importance of the more acutely gendered capitals and the role they play in influencing women's journeys into, through

and out of homelessness. Recognising the affective domain in definitions of homelessness is therefore essential if policy is to meaningfully implement gender-sensitive approaches in response to women's homelessness.

### **Conclusion**

Homeless mothers unaccompanied by their children are frequently invisible in models used to research and understand homelessness. Explanations for their homelessness are often subsumed into discourses of male homelessness. The consequence of this gender-blind approach means that homeless mothers unaccompanied by their children are labelled as 'undeserving' or 'bad' mothers. Recognition of the needs and circumstances of homeless mothers unaccompanied by their children are consequently excluded from consideration in policy responses to homelessness. The result of this, is to deny homeless mothers unaccompanied by their children access to resources which could enhance their nurturing capital. This means that homeless unaccompanied mothers are often deprived of developing the capacity to provide love and care to their children when separated from them.

Failure to recognise the relational and affective dimensions to homelessness constitutes a serious human deprivation for mothers unaccompanied by their children. Affective relations are intimately connected to our sense of well-being, of belonging, to our identity and, to what enables people to lead successful lives (Lynch et al. 2009). Affective inequalities have cumulatively negative effects on homeless mothers when they are not supported in their caring within or across the political, economic or cultural spheres. Incorporating the affective domain into definitions and research on homelessness also provides a possible explanation for the prolonging of some women's hidden homeless journeys, as women seek to avoid normative explanations of gender-care and home- homelessness, that stigmatise them as inadequate women and mothers.

### **Notes**

- i. Women's homelessness is traditionally categorised as either 'family homelessness' or 'single women'.
- ii. The affective system is a unique sphere of social action that is independent of, but intersects with the economic, political and socio-cultural spheres. The affective system is concerned with "providing and sustaining relations of love, care and solidarity" (Lynch et al. 2009, p.12). Affective relations are seen as essential for human growth and development, and for the well-being of human beings (Lynch 2007). Where access to affective relations is denied, where someone has the capacity to provide love and care, this constitutes a significant injustice (Lynch et al. 2009).
- iii. See Mayock and Sheridan 2013; Mayock et al. 2012; 2013; 2014; 2015a
- iv. See the earlier study by Halpenny et al. (2001) that also reveals the prevalence of gender-based violence and homelessness across the life course.
- v. See the Ethos definition which offers a continuum that recognises different forms of housing exclusion fn.10



- vi. FEANTSA is a European Federation of 130 member national organisations working with homeless people that aims to 'prevent and alleviate the poverty and social exclusion of people threatened by or living in homelessness' (<http://www.feantsa.org/spip.php?rubrique13> accessed 01/03/16)
- vii. The theoretical domains of homelessness include: rooflessness; houselessness; insecure and inadequate housing; inadequate housing (FEANTSA 2005). Included in these four theoretical dimensions are thirteen conceptual categories that classify people as being homelessness according to their living situation (FEANTSA 2005).
- viii. The three sub-groups identified include; "transitional (people who use emergency accommodation for brief periods of time and do not return); episodic (people who move repeatedly in and out of emergency accommodation); and chronic (people who are long-term users of emergency accommodation and who may have repeated experiences of living rough)" (O'Sullivan 2012, p.13).
- ix. Kuhn and Culhane (1998) used administrative data gathered on use of public shelters for homeless people in two cities in North America over specific time periods; New York (1988-1995) and Philadelphia (1991-1995).
- x. For example, the use of categories of women's homelessness based on family status, which define women with dependent children as part of the family homeless population, and single women as those without children.
- xi. Similarly a recent US study by Welch-Lazoritz et al. 2015 featuring 148 homeless women noted that 91.99% of the respondents (136 women) had experienced at least one pregnancy, but most 75.77% or 112 women were not accompanied by their children at the time of their interviews. See also Mayock and Sheridan (2012)
- xii. Nurturing capital involves; 'the capacity to nurture others, that is available to us individually, socially and politically' (Lynch and Walsh 2009, p.39).

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